

NELLIS ABC WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 5,718 acres

The Nellis ABC Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (NV-050-04R-15) is located at the northern end of Las Vegas Valley. The study area is divided into three small sub-areas separated by roads. All three sections of this WSA will be considered as one. Sub-area A encompasses 1,971 acres, B has 2,713 and C has 1,024 acres for a combined total of 5,718 acres. The WSA was originally inventoried as part of a 13,400 acre parcel. The study area comprises the natural portion of the original parcel which was contiguous to the Desert National Wildlife Range (DNWR) area recommended for wilderness.

The area is bound on the west by private land; to the east by the Nellis Small Arms Range; to the north by the DNWR; and to the south by man-made features (earthen dikes).

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 0 acres recommended for wilderness 5,718 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to release the entire 5,718 acres for uses other than wilderness. Lack of wilderness values, the area's small size and the reduction of conflicts with utility and rail line developments were key considerations in the recommendation.

The WSA generally appears natural, but outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation are lacking. The area's small size and lack of topographic or vegetative screening limits opportunities for solitude. Outstanding opportunities for primitive types of recreation are unavailable as interesting destinations and focal points of interest are absent from the study area.

The no wilderness recommendation for the WSA would also emphasize making the area available for utility and rail line development. The expansion and growth of the Las Vegas Valley has sparked the need for utility expansion. In addition, the Department of Energy has identified a route through the WSA for development of a rail line to the potential Yucca Mountain repository. The values of both these potential developments outweigh the WSA's wilderness values.

Over the long-term naturalness within the WSA would be diminished by the increase in motorized recreational activity and the development of potential utilities and a rail line.

Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), a special feature identified in the area, would not receive added protection afforded from wilderness designation.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The WSA is in a natural condition. It consists of a flat bajada sloping gently south from the Sheep Range. It is highly eroded, creating a deeply rutted but uniform terrain. Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use is the primary intrusive feature.

B. Solitude: The WSA provides less than outstanding opportunities for solitude. The low-growing vegetation and open landscape provide minimal screening for visitors and there are few secluded locales.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The study area's small size, irregular configuration and lack of variety and interesting features does not permit a visitor an outstanding opportunity or limited opportunities for horseback riding and sightseeing.

D. Special Features: The desert tortoise (Gopherus agassizii), listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species on April 2, 1990, has been identified within the WSA. All of the study area has been identified as tortoise habitat.

4. MANAGEABILITY

Nellis ABC is capable of being managed as wilderness, but there will be some manageability concerns associated with the one oil and gas lease. However, any rights associated with the lease are not expected to be exercised. There would be management concerns dealing with the WSA's small size and OHV accessibility.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The entire WSA was rated as having moderate potential for nonmetallic minerals (sand and gravel). There are no mining claims, prospects or mines located within the study area.

Although an oil and gas lease almost covers one section within the WSA, it was rated as having low potential. There is moderate potential for geothermal resources throughout the study area.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA SPECIFIC COMMENTS

In 1986, the area was reinstated in the wilderness study process as a result of an April 1985 decision in Sierra Club vs Watt concerning certain lands that were deleted from wilderness review in 1982 and 1983. As a result of the court case, the area was reinventoried to document wilderness characteristics.

Six public comments were received pertaining to the decision of the original inventory of the WSA. All six comments disagreed with the decision that the area be approved as a WSA. The comments cited that the area lacked opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

Two public hearings were held during the public review period on the Draft EIS. The first was in Las Vegas, Nevada, on August 3, 1988. Oral statements were presented by 22 people. Six oral statements were presented at the second hearing at Reno, Nevada on August 4, 1988. One of the oral comments supported the Proposed Action (No Wilderness) for the study area. The other comments did not mention the WSA.

Of the 36 written comments, six supported the Proposed Action and none proposed All Wilderness. The subjects of the comments were potential rail rights-of-way, race courses and mineral resources.

In a letter from the Clearinghouse of the State of Nevada, dated September 7, 1988, the Director of the Clearinghouse said, "...the State concurs with the recommendation presented in the document." The document referred to is the Draft Nevada Contiguous Lands Wilderness EIS.

No comments were received from Clark County or the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas.